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# ENG 3704-001: Am Literature: 1950 to present

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## ENGLISH 3704 – AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1950-PRESENT: 3 CR

Professor: Dr. Marjorie Worthington  
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Class: Coleman Hall 3609, MWF, 12:00-12:50pm  
Office Hours: MW 10:00am-12:00pm or by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In this course, we will study fiction from 1950 to the present, paying particular attention to the ways in which the contemporary moment is marked by feelings of being trapped and controlled. Sometimes, characters feel trapped by their circumstances, by the others in their lives, and even by cultural systems over which they have no control—systems they sense but cannot fully understand. Or, it could all be in their minds. For some, it is impossible to tell whether a character is imagining things or whether the forces of the world really are lined up against her. The contemporary moment is replete with the notion that the Truth is impossible to discern and may not even exist; the world is a complex place where questions abound but answers are elusive.

**NOTE:** Not only does this course require a great deal of reading, but I also expect you to be active participants in discussion, not just by talking about the books we read, but about how the books we read connect to other aspects of contemporary American life. I am particularly interested (as you will see) in the conspiracy theories that abound—the best students in this course will come to class ready to discuss how those conspiracy theories

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES INCLUDE (BUT NOT LIMITED TO):**

- To read, discuss and analyze representative texts of the late twentieth century to the present.
- To familiarize ourselves with differing critical and cultural stances on some of these works.
- To learn about and engage in literary research.
- To hone skills related to writing literary and cultural analyses.

### **TEXTS:**

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)  
Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (1961)  
Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962)  
Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)  
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)  
Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (1992)  
Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (1993)  
Michael Chabon, *The Final Solution* (2004)  
Jess Walter, *The Zero* (2006)  
Coleson Whitehead, *Zone One* (2011)  
Phil Klay, "Money as a Weapons System" (2014) (via email)

**ASSIGNMENTS:** For each of these, I will provide a more in-depth assignment sheet when the time comes.

**NOTE:** You must complete ALL assignments to pass this course. So, even if you could earn a passing grade numerically, you will not pass unless all assignments have been completed.

**Short Essays:** Over the course of the semester, you will write five, one-page, single-spaced, typed essays. They will cover the reading assigned for the particular day on which they are due. Notice that these are

not “response papers” but ESSAYS; I don’t want to know how the reading makes you *feel*, but rather I want you to make a literary *argument* of some kind. So, although short, these essays should be focused and thesis-driven. It is my hope that these essays will: 1) help you keep up with the reading; and 2) generate interesting ideas for discussion. For that reason, you **must** be in class and **must contribute to class discussion that day** in order to get credit for the essay.

**Short Essay Groups (by last name):**

[Group A: Bonnot, Caulkins, Dixon]; [Group B: Forbes, Halloran, Hempen, Hunt]; [Group C: Kennedy, Laskey, Leake]; [Group D: Leben, Neff, Niehaus, Preradovic]; [Group E: Santo, Sneed Morton, Warfel]

**Historical Analysis Essay:** Choose a historical topic from one of the texts we have read and research it further. Make connections between the topic and the novel we read. Write an essay that demonstrates how your research into your topic provides a deeper insight into the literary text. Example: How does a more in-depth knowledge of the WWII Italian theater help you understand *Catch-22* better? Or, how does *Invisible Man* skewer the Communist Party in 1940s America?

**Contemporary Issues Essay:** For this essay, you may choose a topic related to one or more of the books we have read and discuss how it connects with a similar contemporary issue. You will need to do research about this topic and how it connects both to the novel and to the contemporary moment. Example: how attitudes about mental illness today are similar to and different from those depicted in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

**Oral Presentation:** You will do an oral report based on the argument of one of your essays (you can choose either one). Present your argument and your evidence in a 5-10-minute presentation. Be as interesting and informative as possible; use visual aids or handouts if you like (I can make photocopies for you if you let me know ahead of time).

**Final Exam:** This will be cumulative and take-home and, therefore, open book. Don’t be deceived, though: open-book tests are quite difficult and *not* the time to catch up on reading you didn’t do before. The best thing to do is to keep up with the reading and discussion as the course goes on.

**Extra Credit:** Bring an article or news item that relates to one of the novels we have read or are reading. If you can relate something actually happening in the world to an aspect of one of our texts, I will give you 10 points of extra credit.

**Grade Breakdown:**

5 Short Essays	20% (4% each)
Historical Analysis Essay	25%
Contemporary Issues Essay	25%
Oral Presentation	20%
Final Exam	10%

**POLICIES:**

**Attendance:** Your consistent attendance and participation are necessary to make this class the vibrant exchange of ideas it should be and I take attendance every day (even if you do not see me doing it). You are permitted no more than three unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence after three will lower your final grade by thirty points (3%). Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation.

**Office Hours:** The hours listed above are times when I will be in my office ready to meet with students. You can also make a special appointment to see me if you are unable to come during office hours. I encourage you to come and talk to me about your work as often as you like.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as de-fined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be re-ported to the Office of Student Standards.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is defined as appropriating words or ideas that are not your own without giving proper credit. The temptation to plagiarize can be great, particularly in the advent of extensive computer technology and the collaborative nature of our class. However, the consequences of plagiarism are dire and can result in a grade of F for the assignment and even for the course. It will also result in a report to the Judicial Affairs Office.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

**The Student Success Center:** Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, text taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

**COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION:** Emphasis on such topics as the Fabulous 50's, the Beats, emerging minority cultures, the rise of feminism, postmodernism, and minimalism. Writers may include Bishop, Ginsberg, Plath, Bellow, Vonnegut, Shepard, Kesey, Olson, Baraka, Mason, Erdrich, Morrison. (Group 3C) WI

### ENG 3704 READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

August 24 M Introduction  
26 W *Invisible Man*, Chaps. 1-8  
28 F *Invisible Man*, Chaps. 9-10

A 31 M *Invisible Man*, Chaps. 11-17  
B Sept. 2 W *Invisible Man*, Chaps. 18-21  
C 4 F *Invisible Man*, Chaps. 22-end

7 M **Labor Day – no class**  
D 9 W *Catch-22*, Chaps. 1-15  
E 11 F *Catch-22*, Chaps. 16-21

A 14 M *Catch-22*, 22-35  
B 16 W *Catch-22*, 35-end  
C 18 F Phil Klay, "Money as a Weapons System" (Email)

- D 21 M *Cuckoo's Nest*, pp. 1-136  
E 23 W *Cuckoo's Nest*, pp. 137-204  
A 25 F *Cuckoo's Nest*, pp. 205-end
- B 28 M *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chaps 1-2  
C 30 W *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chaps 3-about ½ way through Chapter 5 (pgs. 90 or so)  
D Oct. 2 F *The Crying of Lot 49*, The other ½ of Chapter 5

- E 5 M *The Crying of Lot 49*, Chaps. 6-7  
A 7 W *Ceremony*, pp. 1-93  
B 9 F *Ceremony*, pp. 93-138

- 12 M *Ceremony*, pp. 138-188  
14 W *Ceremony*, pp. 188-end  
16 F **FALL BREAK – NO CLASS**

**Historical Essay Drafts due**

- C 19 M *Jazz*, pp. 3-150  
21 W *Jazz*, pp. 151-200  
23 F *Jazz*, pp. 201-end

- 26 M *The Final Solution*, Chaps. 1-5  
D 28 W *The Final Solution*, Chaps. 6-8  
E 30 F *The Final Solution*, Chaps. 9-10

**Historical Essay due**

- A Nov 2 M *The Zero*, pp. 1-104  
B 4 W *The Zero*, pp. 105-155  
6 F *The Zero*, pp. 156-206

- 9 M *The Zero*, pp. 207-307  
11 W *The Zero*, pp. 308-end  
C 13 F *Zone One* pp. 1-68

**Contemporary Issues Essay Drafts due**

- D 16 M *Zone One* pp. 69-203  
18 W *Zone One* pp. 204-272  
20 F *Zone One* pp. 273-end

**Contemporary Issues Essays due**

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

- E 30 M *Virgin Suicides*, pp. 1-150  
Dec. 2 W *Virgin Suicides*, pp. 151-200  
4 F *Virgin Suicides*, pp. 201-end

- 7 M **Presentations, Part I**  
9 W **Presentations, Part II**  
11 F **Presentations, Part III**

**Dec. 16 Tuesday, 8:00-10:00am: film showing (maybe *Cuckoo's Nest*, *Catch-22* or *Virgin Suicides*)  
FINAL EXAMS DUE**